

Commercial and Industrial Buildings,  
American House Hotel  
400-414 Central Avenue  
Dubuque  
Dubuque County  
Iowa

HABS No. IA-160-P

HABS  
IOWA,  
31-DUBU.  
13-P-

DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

## American House Hotel

HABS No. IA-160-P

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IOWA,  
31 - DUBUQUE,  
13 - P.

Site Location: 400-414 Central Avenue  
Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa  
DOT designation: Resource Site No. 7.13-7.14  
Cadastral grid: NE1/4 NE1/4 S25 T89N R2E  
USGS quadrangle: Dubuque South Iowa 7.5'  
UTM coordinates: 15.692010.4707430  
Lot dimensions: 27'x 100': .06 acre  
Lot description: City Lot 303

Present Owner: Iowa Department of Transportation  
Present Usage: vacant  
Present Condition: fair/poor

Overall Dimensions: 26'x 74'; 3 stories

Orientation: west

Architectural

Description:

Plan type: 3-story rectangular duplex, with open-plan  
1st floor commercial spaces and center-hall  
upper levels.

Foundation: (below grade)

Structure: wood frame with brick masonry bearing walls.

Ext. walls: common red brick laid in common bond; composi-  
tion siding on corner tower; brick-pattern  
asphalt siding on frame rear addition.

Roofs: shallowly pitched hipped/gabled roof with  
asphalt roll roofing on original section;  
composition flat roof on rear additions.

Chimneys: corbeled brick exterior chimneys on side walls.

Dormers: one gabled dormer on north original section,  
now sheathed with corrugated metal siding.

Openings: painted wood 1/1 double-hung windows on 2nd and  
3rd floors, with plain enframements, wood slip  
sills (original section) or stone lug sills  
(rear addition) and brick segmental arch heads;  
1st floor storefronts with original fixed-sash  
showcase windows, brick/cast iron columns and  
wood bulkheads (north) or replacement plywood  
siding and fixed windows infilled in storefront  
space (south).

Details: moderately corbeled brick courses on parapets;  
circular corner tower attached to upper wall of  
building over southwest corner entrance.

Construction Date : 1857; 1874

Architecture Style: 19th Century Functional

Physical History : John O'Ferrall purchased Dubuque Town Lots 302 and 303 from the United States in September 1840. The following January he sold Lot 303 on the northeast corner of Fourth and Clay streets to Charles S. Hempstead, a prominent Galena (Illinois) attorney. In August 1845 Hempstead deeded them to John C. Cryder to pay off creditors. Cryder held the property only a month before transferring it to Heman Chadwick, who in turn sold it in October 1846 to George P. Hiller and Charles Denzer. In September 1848 the two men agreed to dissolve the partnership and their joint ownership of the property. They subdivided the lot into halves, and, through quit claim deeds, Denzer received the south half on the corner and Hiller received the north. Denzer sold his half to John B. Felton five years later. In 1857 Hiller and Felton constructed the front 38'-deep section of this three-story brick block for the reported cost of \$6,000. Called the American House (the second such hotel in Dubuque to use this name), the building was organized as a duplex structure, consisting of two public spaces on the street level and twenty-eight commercial grade hotel rooms on the floors above. The separate ownership of the two halves is reflected in the difference in storefronts: although both featured cast iron columns and fixed, plate glass showcase windows, they displayed slight differences in configuration, height and detailing. With John T. Farnsworth as the manager, the two halves were run as a single hotel, and the first floor spaces usually housed restaurants or saloons associated with the facility.

After Felton died in August 1858, the American House passed to his widow, Mary, who eventually married George Escher. In April 1865 Hiller sold his interest in the building to Bernard Becke, who held the north half until the turn of the century. Four months later Mary Felton sold the south half to Peter and Theresa Werten [Werten]. Coming to Dubuque in 1858, Peter had engaged in the ice business before marrying Theresa, a native of France, in 1860. The two had had previous hotel management experience in Dubuque prior to purchasing this establishment, and they managed the American House themselves. In 1874 the Wertins built a three-story brick addition onto the rear of the south building. (They may have installed the circular tower on the front corner of the original section, infilling the corner windows with brick.) Costing \$4,000, the addition almost doubled the capacity of the Werten's half of the building. The cause-and-effect of this is unclear, but at about this time Becke formed a separate hotel in the north half, called the Minnesota House (also the second location for this name). Peter Werten died in July 1878, leaving Theresa to manage the American House by herself. This she did until selling the building in October 1887 to Anna [Annie] and "Colonel" Tim Shea. A local politician and former railroad worker, Shea leased the hotel to William Manhart and Anthony Noel, who managed it into the 1890s, before turning the facility back over to Shea; she then leased it to William J. Bartels in 1898. The Minnesota House, on the other hand, was short-lived as a hotel and soon declined into use as a boarding house.

In 1900 Becke sold the north half to John P. Ludowisy, who renamed it the Hotel Ludowisy and then sold it in 1910 to Joseph Rhomberg. A real estate dealer, Rhomberg left the operation of the facility to a series of proprietors who in a six-year span renamed it the Minnesota House, the Belvidere House and, finally, the Illinois House. Rhomberg acquired the other half from Albert Fluckiger in 1939. Throughout these changes in ownership, the two halves of the hotel building remained essentially unchanged. But after decades of deferred maintenance, Rhomberg closed the upper floors permanently about 1941, and only the tavern on the ground floor of the corner building has remained open since. The Aspermont Company, another real estate firm, purchased the south half in 1956 and the north half in 1984. The Iowa Department of Transportation has recently acquired the American House for demolition in the path of a proposed highway.

**Significance:** As the oldest building in the survey area and one of the oldest remaining in Dubuque, the American House Hotel is vitally important in the interpretation of the city's early history. The building's value is enhanced considerably by its high degree of integrity. It is one of Dubuque's more important structures.

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Franklin T. Oldt and P.J. Quigley, *History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago: Goodspeed Historical Association, 1911).  
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**Compiler:** Clayton B. Fraser, Fraserdesign, Loveland Colorado  
October 1988.